

# GMHC Client Fact Sheet

## FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

### ***What are Food Stamps?***

Food stamps, which used to be issued in coupon form, are now issued as a monthly credit. A swipe card is issued and used in participating grocery and food stores to purchase food and other items that the Food Stamp program covers. The Food Stamp program provides additional buying power to low income households in order to increase their food budget. Individuals and families may be eligible for food stamps if they meet certain income guidelines and if they have monthly expenses which do not allow for a sufficient food budget.

### ***How soon can I receive Food Stamps?***

If your household has little or no income or resources (i.e., under \$100 in income and or \$150 in resources) or if your combined PAID rent and utilities is higher than the combined household resources and income in the month you are applying, you must be reviewed for expedited Food Stamps upon request. The caseworker must give a decision on the expedited Food Stamps at the time of the screening. Federal Law requires issuance of expedited Food Stamps as soon as possible within 5 to 7 days of application (day of screening).

### ***How do I apply?***

The Food Stamp Program has a designated office called F15 for SSI recipients. This office processes, by mail, the applications and recertifications of SSI "Live-Alone" households, meaning households consisting of an individual SSI recipient or of a couple who both receive SSI. The number for the SSI Food Stamp Office service line is 718/722-4009 or 718/722-4010. All questions, applications and recertifications can be handled BY MAIL. The address is:

Food Stamp Program  
SSI Office F-15  
233 Schermerhorn Street, 2nd floor  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

### ***➤ But I'm not receiving SSI.***

There is also a Homebound Unit (F-63) for disabled persons who ARE NOT RECEIVING SSI. You do not have to be homebound to apply through this office. You need only to be disabled and **not** receiving SSI. You may be receiving SSDI, NYSD, or private disability insurance payments. The Homebound unit processes all applications and recertifications by mail. The telephone service line number for the Homebound Unit is 718/237-7578.

The address is:

Food Stamp Program, Homebound Unit F-63  
215 Duffield Street  
Brooklyn, New York, 11201

### ***How do I get an application?***

Upon telephone or written request, you will be mailed an application kit which includes the application form and instructions. If you are already receiving food stamps you will be mailed the kit automatically at the time you are due for recertification. You complete the application, attach verification documents (photocopies are acceptable) and mail it back in the stamped, self-addressed envelope which is included in the packet.

Application kits can be obtained by calling the HRA Infoline: 1-877-472-8411 or any Food Stamp Program office.

### ***How much money can I have?***

Households may have up to \$2,000 in resources (cash, stocks and bonds etc.). The limit is \$3,000 for households with a member 60 years or older, or who is disabled. Households exceeding these limits are not eligible for food stamps.

The following resources ARE NOT counted: the home the applicant lives in and its surrounding lot, household goods, and personal belongings.

Examples of resources which MAY COUNT are:

money in checking and savings accounts, stocks and bonds, and land and buildings other than the applicant's residence.

NOTE: Bank books, checking or brokerage account statements are documents which can serve as proof of assets. Documents verifying resources must be current-dated within 60 days of application.

Basic eligibility rules and the kinds of proof that will be required for application are listed below.

NOTE: Documentation must be dated within the last two months, with the sole exception of SSDI or SSI award letters, which may be older.

**Required documents:**

- SSDI/SSI Award letters
- Lease (if the apartment is in the applicant's name). If the lease is in a roommate's name, a statement from the roommate regarding the living situation is required. This statement should indicate that the applicant and the roommate share rent and utilities (state amounts) and that food is purchased and prepared separately.
- Recent rent receipts
- Recent electric and gas bills
- Most recent checking and bank account statements

**Social Security Numbers:**

A social security number is required for every household member. A social security card or SSI/SSDI award letter may serve as verification of Social Security number.

**Can I get Food Stamps if I am an immigrant?**

As of April, 2003, lawful permanent residents (LPRs) who have lived in the country for five years became eligible for Food Stamps, provided they meet all of the usual program requirements. In addition to LPRs who have been here for five years, the following legal immigrants are also eligible for Food Stamps.

- Refugees and asylees are eligible immediately upon entry into the United States.
- Veteran and active duty military personnel, their spouses and minor unmarried children are eligible immediately upon
- Entry into the United States
- Native Americans born in Canada or Mexico who

are entitled by treaty to reside in the U.S. are eligible immediately upon entry into the United States.

- Hmong or Highland Loation tribe members, their spouses, unmarried dependent children, and unremarried surviving spouses are eligible immediately upon entry into the United States; and
- VAWA (Violance Against Woman Act) petitioners: Immigrant women or children who have been battered or subject to extreme cruelty by a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident spouse or parent, AND have pending or approved VAWA cases or family-based petitions before the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) requesting LPR status, providing they have lived in the country for at least five years.

On October, 2003, all legal immigrant children are eligible for Food Stamps immediately upon entry into the United States. (in 1998, Congress restored Food Stamp eligibility to legal immigrant children who entered the United States before August 22, 1996)

Before applying for Food Stamps, individuals should get more information about eligibility for citizenship from one of the following three organizations:

- N.Y. Legal Assistance Group: 212/750-0800
- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights: 212/629-6170
- N.Y. Association for New Americans: 212/425-5051

**How do they calculate the amount I'll get?**

After all the household income is totaled, certain deductions will be subtracted as follows:

- Standard deduction of \$134 to cover basic household expenses (effective October 1, 2003);
- A 20% deduction from earned income (wages, salary);
- Dependent care costs of up to \$200 for each child under 2 years old, \$175 per month for dependents of other ages;
- A portion of high shelter costs with a maximum of \$250 (no maximum if anybody in the household is medically disabled or their age is 60 or older). Households with members who are DISABLED or

60 YEARS OR OLDER may be eligible for additional deductions;

■ Unreimbursed medical costs over \$35 per month, for example doctor bills, Medicare Part B payments, private insurance premiums, cost of meals for a home attendant and transportation to doctors or clinics;

■ A portion of high shelter costs (unlimited amount)  
If an applicant's expenses exceed his or her income, the Food Stamp Program will ask how he or she is managing to live. The applicant may be using savings or someone else may be contributing or the applicant may not be paying the billed expense. An application is not automatically rejected if the applicant's expenses exceed the income. However, there must be a reasonable explanation of how the applicant is able to support himself or herself.

### ***What else?***

**Everything** can be handled **by mail** if the application is sent to the SSI Food Stamp Office (F-15) or the Homebound Unit (F-63). The Food Stamp Program does not assign specific caseloads to workers. Any worker in the service unit who answers the phone can review the case and answer questions.

Food Stamp applications are processed on a "first in, first out" basis. If more information or documentation is required, a written notice will be sent to you. The Food Stamp Program must accept or reject a case within 30 days of receipt of a signed application. However, you must answer all requests for information as soon as possible. If you don't, it will take longer to process your application.

### ***Questions?***

The Human Resources Administration operates a Helpline for callers with questions about Food Stamps and other entitlement programs: 1-877-472-8411.

**The Client Advocacy Unit at GMHC is available to assist you. For more information, please call our Helpline: 212/367-1125, Wednesdays, 2:00 to 5:30 P.M. Walk-in services are available Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.**